

Master Response 8: Visual Impacts from Humboldt Bay and Waterfront Drive

This master response addresses the issues comments raise with respect to visual viewpoints of and through the project site from Humboldt Bay and Waterfront Drive.

The Draft EIR addresses this topic area in Chapter IV.A, Aesthetics; see Impact A-3 (existing visual character of the site and its surroundings), specifically page IV.A-11 and Figures IV.A-6a and -6b, Site Photo and Simulation from Viewpoint 5 of the existing and proposed view from the Second Street extension on Waterfront Drive looking southeast. This master response addresses all or part of the following comments: 9-1, 9-7, 15-4, 16-11, and 17-9.

Commenters note that views through and of the project site from Humboldt Bay and Waterfront Drive are not analyzed in the Draft EIR. Comments specifically state that:

- The Draft EIR should include discussion of the effects on views to the project from coastal resources.
- The proposed project would block much of the vista across the site of the City and the mountains from the marina area.
- The project site, as currently primarily undeveloped, allows views into the City and the mountain skyline behind it. These views would be largely obstructed by the construction of the project.

Response

As discussed on page IV.A-11 of the Draft EIR, the existing view of the project site from Waterfront Drive comprises low-lying vegetation with slight variations in elevation on the project site. Current views through the site are obstructed by a six-foot chain-link fence and vegetation, largely dominated by non-native pampas grass and phragmites. Views beyond the project site include existing buildings that are generally warehouse/light industrial structures with little articulation and few windows. Long-range views include development in the urban core and the forested ridgeline east of the City.

As depicted in Figure IV.A-6a and -6b, Site Photo and Simulation from Viewpoint 5, of the existing and proposed view from the Second Street extension on Waterfront Drive looking southeast, the proposed project would substantially alter the view of and across the project site. The immediate view would be altered by the construction of the Second Street extension and the proposed buildings that would range in height from one to five stories. As suggested in Figure IV.A-6b, the short-range view would include wide, textured sidewalks; low-lying landscaping; street trees; and two- and three-story structures. Long-range views would be interrupted by new structures.

The offshore waters in the vicinity of the project site are part of Humboldt Bay. Public views from the offshore area near the project site are of urban development, largely comprising one- to four-

story structures of varying masses, low-lying vegetation, and a small boat marina. Like the view from Waterfront Drive, long-range views from the Bay include development in the urban core and the forested ridgeline farther to the east. See photo of the shoreline below; the project site is the undeveloped parcel on the far side of Humboldt Bay (Adelman, 2002).

The view of the project site looking southeast toward the project site from Humboldt Bay is obscured by the City marina, which comprises marine-oriented recreation



A view of the project site from the west. (Adelman, 2002)

and municipal uses, including the City-owned, two-story marina building—known as the Wharfinger Building—and its adjacent public marina of 140 boat slips, boat-launching ramps, and surface parking. Views of the project site looking directly east into the site from Humboldt Bay are across vacant parcels owned by the City of Eureka Redevelopment Agency.

Figure 3-3 depicts the location of two new renderings of the proposed Marina Center development, one from inside the site looking towards the proposed Home Depot (Figure 3-4) and the second from the public marina to the west (Figure 3-5).

The California Coastal Act of 1976 made permanent the Coastal Commission and established the conservation and use policies guiding planning and regulation of land and water areas in the new coastal zone established by that law. Specifically, relative to the protection of scenic values, the Act provides that:

The scenic and visual qualities of coastal areas shall be considered and protected as a resource of public importance. Permitted development shall be sited and designed to protect views to and along the ocean and scenic coastal areas, [emphasis added] to minimize the alteration of natural land forms, to be visually compatible with the character of surrounding areas, and, where feasible, to restore and enhance visual quality in visually degraded areas....

The Coastal Commission has implemented scenic resource protection policies primarily by focusing on land-based scenic views from public parks, trails, roads and vista points. Over the years, however, and in recognition of changing recreational use patterns and input from the boating community, the Commission began calling for protection of landscape views from state ocean waters (three miles) in rural areas of the coast that are essentially devoid of development, as well as other areas having unique landforms even in built environments. (The City's certified Local Coastal Program includes numerous viewshed protection policies related to urban development and visual resources. However, they do not specifically identify Humboldt Bay waters as vantage points.) This position takes into account the fact that boating is, and would continue to be, an increasingly important form of coastal recreation that is called out for



SOURCE: Baysinger Partners Architecture PC, 2009

Marina Center Mixed-Use Project EIR . 205513

Figure 3-3
Additional Views of the Proposed Project



HOME DEPOT SITE VIEW BEFORE



HOME DEPOT VIEW AFTER

SOURCE: Baysinger Partners Architecture PC, 2009

Marina Center Mixed-Use Project EIR . 205513

Figure 3-4
Internal View of the Proposed Project



MARINA VIEW BEFORE



MARINA VIEW AFTER

SOURCE: Baysinger Partners Architecture PC, 2009

Marina Center Mixed-Use Project EIR . 205513

Figure 3-5
View of the Proposed Project from the Marina

protection in the Coastal Act. (See section 30224 PRC.) The conceptual basis for this position is that, like scenic vistas from upland public places, the enjoyment of uncluttered views from the ocean to and along California's magnificent coastline is a public resource and aesthetic value of importance to substantial numbers of current and future coastal users. It is an important public interest and a coastal resource worthy of protection.

Section 30250(a) of the Coastal Act provides that "new development, except as otherwise provided in this division, shall be located within, contiguous, with, or in close proximity to, existing developed areas able to accommodate it..." The basic purpose of Section 30250(a) is to promote infill development in existing urban areas along the coast. The development would not impair coastal resources or public access to the coast because the project site sits back from Humboldt Bay, separated by Waterfront Drive, a public roadway. The presence of an expanded and restored wetland area in the southwest portion of site would further enhance views from Humboldt Bay and other waterfront locations. Finally, although the proposed project would be visible from offshore areas, the project would be located in and among existing commercial and industrial development, and therefore, would be consistent with visual character in the vicinity.

While the proposed project structures would alter the visual character of the site, this effect is not considered significant, given the existing conditions of the property and the surrounding urban context of varying building height, bulk, mass, and scale. Nearby views of the site, including views looking east across the site, would be compatible with other buildings in the project vicinity with similar building materials and colors. Furthermore, the proposed project would be subject to design review by the City's Design Review Committee, which would review the exterior design, materials, textures, and colors in the interest of helping ensure the project's visual compatibility with its surroundings.